

Graduation Information and Guidance for Families

Changes in Definition of Regular High School Diploma, Effective Fall 2018

Overview of the Change

The Iowa State Board of Education has amended Iowa's special education rules related to the graduation of individuals eligible for special education and the definition of a regular high school diploma. The state has made changes to be consistent with the required language in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The change means it is no longer permissible to award a regular high school diploma based solely on IEP goal attainment. The term "regular high school diploma" must be fully aligned to State-required standards. Your local school district may have additional graduation requirements that go beyond the minimum State requirements. In Iowa, the minimum graduation requirements are:

- Four years of English Language Arts
- Three years of Mathematics
- Three years of Social Studies
- Three years of Science
- Completion of the local school district's expectations for physical education (PE)

To earn a regular high school diploma going forward, all students, including students with disabilities, must meet their local school district's graduation requirements, which at a minimum, must include 4-3-3-3 and the completion of district PE requirements, in addition to any services required to receive a FAPE (i.e., goal completion).

When did the change go into effect?

The application of the graduation requirements began in 2018 with the 9th grade cohort (Class of 2022).

Impacts on Students with Disabilities

- It is the expectation that the majority of special education students will be able to meet the 4-3-3-3 requirements. It is the IEP team's responsibility, beginning in 8th grade to develop a pathway to 4-3-3-3 that meets your student's unique needs and results in a regular high school diploma.
- Your local school district will need to consider the continuum of services they provide for students and develop processes that ensure alignment of the continuum to the 4-3-3-3 and their graduation policies.
- With careful consideration of each student's capabilities, strengths, and interests, the IEP team will determine if accommodations and/or modifications are needed to meet graduation requirements.
- The IEP team will want to ensure that the plan created has high expectations for learning that align with your student's post-secondary expectations.
- Progress toward completion of 4-3-3-3 should be communicated at least annually in the course of study section of your student's IEP. The IEP team can choose to establish more frequent reporting to ensure timely completion of requirements and revision or provision of new supports. Your student's IEP team will need to design processes to measure progress toward meeting 4-3-3-3, and communicate that progress with you and your student.
- Local school districts may offer a certificate of completion or attendance. These certificates do not

limit a student's access to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE). The IEP team determines what constitutes FAPE for each student based on the unique needs of that student. Students who have a special education need and who have not received a regular high school diploma are eligible for FAPE until age 21. A student may use this time to continue to work towards meeting 4-3-3-3 requirements.

Possible Actions for Families

1. Know your school district's graduation requirements and policies.
2. Communicate with your student's IEP team about your district's graduation requirements/policies and how they apply to your student.
3. Work with the IEP team to identify what your student might need to meet graduation requirements, including consideration of accommodations and/or modifications.
4. Maintain high expectations for your student's progress toward challenging goals and needed services, and when needed, advocate for this in the IEP.
5. Consider what your student wants to do after high school and what is needed to prepare them for working towards their goals.
6. Keep in mind that every student's path to graduation may look different and should be individualized based on their unique needs and goals.
7. Work with your student's IEP team to determine how frequently you want to be informed of progress towards graduation requirements.
8. Keep in mind that special education students, like all students, have a range of interest and investment in their high school efforts. Special education students should not be held to a higher standard than their peers.
9. When you are unsure and need support, reach out to available resources to help you navigate through this process.

Resources That Can Help

One of the best resources for students and their families is the IEP team. This is a great place to start with working through specific questions and concerns. In addition to IEP team members, families can always contact ASK Resource Center.

ASK Resource Center *'Iowa's parent training, information and advocacy center for families.'* Phone: 515-243-1713 Toll-free: 800- 450-8667 Email: info@askresource.org